The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

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CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART BUYS OLD MASTER PAINTING FROM ROTHSCHILD COLLECTION AT CHRISTIE'S AUCTION

CLEVELAND — Frans Hals' portrait of the wealthy merchant Tieleman Roosterman, considered the most important work by the Dutch Old Master to come onto the market for many years, has been purchased by The Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA), announced Kate M. Sellers, CMA acting director, late last week. London art dealer Clovis Whitfield bought the painting on the museum's behalf last Thursday evening at the Christie's sale of the Rothschild family collection, paying $12.8 million, more than four times the previous record for a Frans Hals painting.

"Hals is one of the three great masters of Dutch painting, along with Rembrandt and Vermeer. This is one of the finest paintings Hals ever produced, from one of the world's most prestigious collections. It is an absolute masterpiece that transforms our collection. It is a great pleasure to bring this remarkable work to Cleveland's Dutch painting gallery," said Ms. Sellers. "Uniting this painting with our Hals *Portrait of a Woman* will create an extraordinary experience for our visitors. Together, there's a dynamic, showing Hals' range of bravura and restraint, of energy and presence."

The painting is expected to be on view at the CMA within the next two weeks.

The painting was one of the final works to be sold in two auction sessions at Christie's Great Rooms in London selling works of art from the collection formed in the 19th century by Baron Albert and Baron Nathaniel von Rothschild. Confiscated by the Third Reich and stored in salt mines during World War II, the collection has been in the hands of Austrian state museums until earlier this year, when the Austrian government returned it to the heirs of the Barons Alphonse and Louis, sons of Albert von Rothschild, and granted permission for the works to leave Austria. In addition to this and other paintings, the collection comprised exceptional furniture, sculpture, scientific instruments, arms and armor, silver, porcelain, glass, musical instruments, and rare Persian carpets. Only the famous Rothschild prayer book, a medieval illuminated manuscript, sold for more than the Hals, at $13.3 million.

The CMA's portrait is three-quarter-length, showing the ruddy-cheeked Roosterman in a black doublet and breeches, with a white ruff and lace-edged cuffs, his left hand holding his large fur hat. He sports shoulder-length hair and a carefully groomed moustache and goatee. It was executed in 1634. Archival photographs show the painting hanging in Baron Nathaniel's Theresianumgasse residence in Vienna (destroyed in 1952).

"This is a fabulous addition to our collection," said Diane De Grazia, CMA's chief curator and curator of paintings and drawings. "It is now our most important Dutch picture. The sitter's aggressive and self-assured personality comes through and the bold brushwork defines the subtle differences in the various black textures of velvet, beaver, and silk. The cultural and economic riches of 17th-century Netherlands are summed up in this picture of a Haarlem businessman whose trade was in luxury linen and silk."

The painting is inscribed and dated prominently in the upper right "ÆTAT SVÆ 36/AN°/34" ("at 36 years old in the year 1634"). The Roosterman coat of arms above the inscription was added much later. The portrait is 46 x 34-1/2 inches (117 x 87 cm). It has been exhibited at the Kunsthistoriches Museum, Vienna, since 1947.

The $12.8 million purchase price was paid through the CMA's Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., Fund established in 1958 for purchase of art of major importance. This is the most CMA has paid at auction for a work of art.

The CMA is one of the world's leading art museums, known for the breadth and overall high quality of its permanent collection and for its significant exhibitions. The CMA opens **Bugatti**, the first American exhibition devoted to three generations of the Bugatti family, on July 18, 1999. For more information about CMA, visit its web site at www.clemusart.com.

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